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Woman's Board of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church,
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A Helpmeet For Him

By

Eleanor A. Hunter

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BY ELEANOR A. HUNTER.

WHEN Kitty Hastings married the Rev. John Carter, people said she had made a mistake. It was well known that John was not her only chance. She had had more than one wealthy wooer, but with the perversity of her sex she had chosen John Carter, and John had no more money than she had.

Kitty was a pretty girl, small and slight, with graceful, gentle ways. She had a pair of honest clear, gray eyes, and anybody who got one good look from them trusted her at once. Everybody liked Kitty Hastings, and a good many people loved her.

As for John, he was tall and slender; a scholarly looking fellow, and indeed he had taken honors in his college course. There was nothing otherwise noticeable in his appearance, but there was a world of quiet determination written in the lines of his face, and he was, as Kitty often proudly said to herself, "as good as gold."

And John had decided to become a Home Missionary. "What a mistake!" people said again

"He should take a Professor's chair in some college, where he could indulge his scholarly tastes." But John felt that he had a "call" and Kitty stood by him; so he applied to the Home Board, was accepted and appointed to—of all places in the world—Bitter Creek.

Bitter Creek was a typical western town. The new railway running through it made it the natural outlet for a series of mining camps, and the stream from which it took its name ran through a wide and fertile valley, sure to be occupied by settlers. The first house built in Bitter Creek was a slab shanty for a railway station; the second was a liquor saloon, and the third was the "Occidental Hotel," and in four weeks from the time these buildings were erected, Bitter Creek had seven hundred inhabitants and more were pouring in daily.

When John and Kitty arrived at Bitter Creek, they went to board at the Occidental Hotel, but the prices of that establishment were far beyond John's slender purse, and he made haste to build a little cabin like the others. It was, perhaps, one of the poorest shelters ever called by the beautiful name of home, but John and Kitty were very glad and thankful to be in it, and just as soon as John had Kitty fairly settled, he set about his Master's business in good earnest.

But how could a man like John, a little shy, a little stiff, a little formal in manner, trained in all the wisdom of the schools, but with no great

knowledge of human nature, get into touch with such a community as this?

There was no room in the town where he could hold service, so one Sunday he invited them to meet him in the open air. He stood upon a dry-goods box, surrounded by a crowd of rough faces, and Kitty standing close beside him sang like a thrush—

"I am so glad that our Father in heaven
Tells of His love in the book He has given,
Wonderful things in the Bible I see;
This is the dearest, that Jesus loves me."

They listened in silence while she sang, and were quiet during the opening prayer, but when John began to preach, interest flagged, and he found it hard to hold his audience.

Still, they did not despair. John succeeded after a little in erecting a building where he could hold services, though few came to the meetings. But John put in a word wherever he could, and Kitty made friends wherever she could. There were a few children in the place, and they gathered them into Sunday school. People soon found out that Parson Carter and his wife were friends worth having in sickness. Kitty would go with nourishing and delicate food, ready to nurse or to do anything to relieve the sufferer; and John was always by her side, strong and helpful.

So they lived until after baby Jack was born; and there never was such a baby, so merry, so hearty, so loving, and afraid of nothing in all the world. He was a little evangelist in his own right.

Bitter Creek could not resist him. The rough miners coming down from camp used to pause at the window to see him while Kitty was putting him to bed, and she used to call them in, and put him, all rosy and warm in his little flannel night-gown, right into their arms. After the frolic she would treat the company to cups of hot coffee, and taking the baby would just sit down and sing while they listened,

"Hush my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed."

until the boy was fast asleep.

One evening a messenger came for John, saying that a very sick man had need of him. On inquiry it was found that the sick man was at a little settlement ten miles distant. John had never left Kitty alone at night before, and he hesitated.

"You must go, John," decided Kitty. "You must not miss this chance to do the Lord's bidding."

So, after a little consideration, John went for Mrs. Mulligan, a decent and kindly Irish neighbor, to come and stay with Kitty, and then started upon his lonely ride.

That was a dreadful night at Bitter Creek. A company of miners were in town. There was a great deal of drinking and excitement and finally a quarrel, a pistol shot, and a poor drunken wretch fell dead, pierced through the heart by a bullet. The saloon-keeper instantly put out his lights, fearing the fray would continue. There were a

few moments of wild confusion, but presently the dead man's friends bore him out into the air. They soon saw that the shot had proved fatal. Some started to apprehend the murderer, but others remained by the poor dead body. They tried to return with it to the saloon, but the keeper of that establishment prudently refused to open his doors again. So they placed the remains upon a shutter and bore them to the Occidental; but the landlord there refused them a resting place. It was a cold night, and something must be done, but no one knew where to go next for an asylum. At last one of the men spoke:

"Boys," said he, "let's go to Parson Carter's; he'll take poor Harry in, I know."

And so, about two o'clock in the morning, Kitty was aroused by a knock at the door. She hastily dressed, and opened it.

"Where's the Parson?" inquired a rough voice.

"He is at Brownsville, with a sick man," explained Kitty. "What do you wish with him?"

"Nothing," stammered the man, embarrassed by the unexpected reply, "It's no matter, don't you be frightened. We just wanted the parson for something, that's all."

But Kitty had been looking at that black motionless heap, which they had brought with them, and which they had laid upon the path as they parleyed.

"Is anyone hurt?" she asked.

"No, ma'am," said the man. "Leastways he ain't hurt now."

"Is he dead? Why do you bring him here?" asked Kitty—she had not lived a year in Bitter Creek for nothing.

"Because," answered the man in despair, "we ain't got nowhere else to put him."

He tried not to swear before Kitty, as he told how he had been refused shelter for his poor dead friend, and how as a last resort they had brought him to the parson's.

Kitty made her decision instantly. "You have done quite right," said she. "It is just what my husband would wish; bring him in."

"Are you sure you won't be afraid, ma'am?" asked the man.

"I am not afraid," answered Kitty. "Bring him in, lay him in the sitting-room, and I will take care of him until morning."

They obeyed her, and laid their burden on the floor of the little room.

Kitty went into the bedroom and returned with a pillow for the poor head which would never need one more. She knelt by the dead man, and, folding back the old coat which covered him, she lifted his head and slipped the pillow gently under it. When she saw his face she knew it, and she could not repress one pitiful little cry, and then with hands that never trembled she closed the staring eyelids, and going to the bedroom once more she returned with a handkerchief of John's,

which she laid gently over the quiet face; while the rough men stood awkwardly by, speechless, and watching her as if fascinated.

"There," said she, turning to them, "you can go now; I will take care of him—poor fellow!—until my husband comes."

One or two of them tried to thank her with rough, husky voices, and one, the dead man's special comrade, asked if he should not stay with her until her husband came. But Kitty gently refused this offer, for indeed she was more afraid of the living than the dead. She afterward discovered, however, that this same man sat quietly upon the doorstep until he saw John riding down the road in the early morning.

Kitty and her humble friend kept the vigil together. Mrs. Mulligan upon her knees murmured prayers for the dead man's soul, and Kitty kneeling beside her prayed also; but she prayed for the living; and so John found the two women when he reached home.

That afternoon at sunset the murdered man was buried in the little graveyard which lay upon the bleak hillside just outside the town. John conducted the services. He spoke gently of the poor man whom they were laying away; but he did not neglect to speak a few solemn words, which came right from his heart, to the little company who listened. He told them what their responsibility was for that sad tragedy, and reminded them

that such an end might easily be theirs if their lives remained unchanged.

That week a deputation came to call upon John and Kitty. The spokesman was the dead man's special friend.

"Parson," said he, "we know you'd like to preach to us. We know it's your business, and we hain't behaved very polite to you about it, but now we're ready to listen. We know you're the right sort, an' as for your wife"—the speaker hesitated, and his voice shook—"she's the kind of a woman who makes a man believe in the angels, whether or no. There *must* be a God, or there couldn't be wimmen like her. And what we want to say is, if you have a big audience on Sunday, don't you be skeered. They'll behave perfectly respectful, an' you can say what you please to 'em;" and he added shyly, "if Mrs. Carter would sing us a song, the boys would be mighty pleased."

On Sunday the rude little church was filled to overflowing, but it was a quiet and respectful audience. And Kitty did sing; and John preached as he never had preached before, for he was filled with the power of the Holy Spirit; and many souls were born again as the result of that blessed day's labor.

These incidents happened a number of years ago. As was expected the fertile valley filled with settlers, and John broke the Bread of Life to them, while Kitty went out and in among them winning all hearts.

"She is the one," said John. "who opens the way for me."

Many of the settlers were poor foreigners, ignorant of many things. It was Kitty who taught their wives to make wholesome bread, how to cut their children's garments and how to sew them neatly. She was full of a sweet wisdom as to the care and training of children and the nursing of the sick. And everyone who was in trouble turned to her for help and sympathy as naturally as a child goes to its mother. And what she was, and is, to her husband, with her indomitable courage and cheer, her sanctified common sense, her lovely intuitions, and her utter unselfishness, only he knows.

By-and-by there were schoolhouses built in that valley, and John and Kitty had the help of intelligent men and women in their work. At last a beautiful church was built, and paid for, and John had the happiness of preaching the first sermon ever heard within its walls.

Then the Home Board said to John: "Another man can carry on this work, while you are peculiarly calculated for the frontier. Will you not go again to the front and open another new field?"

And John, like the true Soldier of the Cross that he is, answered. "I will go;" and to-day he stands again in the front rank with his face to the foe, and Kitty stands by his side.

Among friends of Home Missions John's worth I am glad to say is recognized, and the magnificent

work which he is doing is spoken of appreciatively. But Kitty's labors are not noticed. Her name is not "mentioned in the dispatches," and yet the fight is hardest upon her, and she shows a courage which even transcends John's. In fact John could never do the work he does without her.

She has four little mouths to feed now, and four dear little bodies to clothe, and yet John's salary is no larger than it was when he was married, and even that is not always promptly paid, for the Board itself is sometimes in debt to them, because the great Presbyterian Church does not pay all "its tithes into the storehouse." Kitty has to work far too hard. She scrubs, she cleans, she cooks, she sews; she stops at nothing by which she can make her family comfortable; and she helps John in his parish work besides.

Kitty has grown too early old, and she is very tired. She does not falter. No; but unless help comes soon, she will slip from John's side like a wreath of snow in the spring sunshine, and to her husband and children, and to the church of Christ, she will be an irreparable loss.

Kitty is not the only woman whose precious life is being poured out like water upon the Home Mission fields of the Church, and in these days when the cause of Christ needs every helper, is it right for us who stay at home to allow our sisters who are bearing the burden and the heat of the day, in the tremendous conflict which is now going on between the evil and the good, to make so costly and so needless a sacrifice?

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THE HOME MISSION MONTHLY is an illustrated magazine published by the Woman's Board of Home Missions, and is indispensable to an intelligent comprehension of Woman's work for the evangelization of the Home land. Each number contains fresh letters from the front, abundant material on the topic of the month, and a department of Hints and Helps which will be found very suggestive in conducting a society. It also contains a department for young people. THE SUBSCRIPTION PRICE IS FIFTY CENTS PER YEAR. Address subscriptions to MISS S. F. LINCOLN, 156 Fifth Avenue, New York City.